

## HISTORICAL NOTES

At the front of the sanctuary in Christ Church United, on the High Street wall, there is a tablet which bears the following inscription:

"To the Memory of James Francis  
1840-1898

Major 2nd Mass. Inf.

Brevet Lieut. Col. U.S.V.

A Faithful officer in the War  
which preserved the Union  
and destroyed slavery

His Companions in Arms of the  
Commandery of the State of  
Massachusetts

of the

Military Order of the Loyal  
Legion of the United States

have placed this tablet

James Francis was born in Lowell in 1840, the son of James B. and Sarah Francis. At age twenty, after completing his education, he went to work at the Lowell Machine Shop as an apprentice, learning the details of the business.

On April 20, 1861, Mr. Francis enlisted in the Union Army, serving with the Second Massachusetts Regiment. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant on May 25, 1861.

Mr. Francis served throughout the War, seeing service in the Shenandoah Valley, with the Army of the Potomac in the winter of 1862-63, and in many battles including Chancellorsville, Cedar Mountain, Gettysburg, and Antietam, where he was wounded. He later served in the West and was with Sherman on his march to the sea, participating in all the engagements on that march. He was made a Brevet Lieutenant Colonel in March of 1865 for distinguished gallantry and was commissioned a Lieutenant Colonel in July, 1865.

After discharge from the Army, Col. Francis, as he was thereafter known, was one of the engineers in charge of the construction of the Hoosac Tunnel. In 1866 he returned to Lowell and joined the Locks & Canals Company, where in 1867 he was made Assistant Engineer.

On January 1, 1885, Col. Francis was made Agent and Engineer for the Locks & Canals. In assuming this position he succeeded his famous father, James Bicheno Francis, who served as Chief Engineer from 1837 to 1885. James B. Francis was responsible for Francis Gate, built in 1850 to keep flood waters from entering the Pawtucket Canal. The Gate was lowered in 1852 and in 1936, thus keeping downtown Lowell from being destroyed by flood.

Col. Francis was married to Caroline Forbes, by whom he had three children, Joseph, Clara, and Duncan. After his wife's death in 1889, he married Mary Carew in 1892.

Col. Francis died Dec. 1, 1898. He had been very active in Republican politics and in civic affairs and was a member of the First Unitarian Church. The Memorial Tablet was originally placed in that church, and was moved to its present location when the High Street Church and the First Unitarian Church united to form All Souls Church.

Barbara F. Reed

Source:

Obituary - Lowell Daily Courier

Pollard Memorial Library